



**UP TO SPEED:** Joyce and David Lifton now have broadband  
 ‘Service has let us book our holiday’

DAVID Lifton, 73, and wife, Joyce, 76, live in Park Gate Road, Well Hill.

Mr Lifton said: “Unfortunately until now, there’s been a dead zone between Badgers Mount and Crockenhill. We tried to get broadband six months ago but the phone company, although it promised a lot, provided little. Even its engineers didn’t know this area’s reputation – they spent two weeks trying to provide a service before admitting defeat.

“We’re on the old Knockholt exchange and ours are the last places on the line, so signals are very weak.

“We heard about the Call Flow service through word of mouth; it’s been great. We’re not heavy users – more casual and social.

“We’re both retired and like to travel. But without broadband, even getting holiday info is increasingly difficult. The cruise companies, in particular, insist on doing things on the internet. It used to make us a bit angry when they assumed everyone had access. Often, we would just give in. That’s all changed now.”

# Village landlord finally finds tenants after improving broadband

## The Whippet that wins the internet access race

By **Doug Kempster**  
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THEY are the standard questions prospective buyers throw at estate agents every day – is the property close to shops, schools, public transport? Does it have central heating or a garage?

But, increasingly, broadband coverage is being added to the “must-haves” for would-be homeowners or tenants.

The lack of decent rural broadband has become more than just a bar to 21st century communications for some Sevenoaks communities; it can damage their property prices.

### Boosts

For the residents of Well Hill, near Shoreham, that risk has now been lifted following the introduction of a communications system known as Whippet Internet. This boosts rural broadband using wireless technology.

For Mark Homans, 49, who was trying to rent out his house in the shadow of Lullingstone Park Golf Course, its arrival is not a moment too soon.

“I bought my house to live in but, because of a changing economic situation, I had to look at renting it out,” he said.

“The fact that my place didn’t have broadband wasn’t a problem for me, and my previous tenants weren’t concerned. But when they moved out it became a real issue.

“The house ticked all the right boxes, a great location, mod cons



**BOOST:** A new service backed by KCC has transformed broadband access in a ‘not spot’

etc. But the minute prospective tenants realised it didn’t have broadband, they lost interest.

“The problem is, we take the internet for granted these days – it’s just there.

“So people assume they’ll have access when they’re looking at properties to buy or rent. They expect it as standard.”

Well Hill lies in an area dubbed a “broadband not spot” by residents.

It is at the end of the line of its local telephone exchange, so the distance a broadband data signal has to travel, combined with the area’s ageing cables, has meant that internet access has been severely restricted.

Mr Homans said: “Not only are we a long way from the exchange, but the telephone cables are old and not up to the job of delivering quality broadband.

“I called Sky in, I also tried a



dongle that uses the mobile network, but the most I could manage was half a meg download.

“It could take half an hour to get a web page up.

“And the problem with renting is that my prospective tenants weren’t interested in anything less than an 8mb download.”

His salvation came in the form of Whippet Internet, a Kent County Council-backed service which uses transmitters attached to a nearby Vodafone mobile phone mast to boost the broadband signal.

The service has proved so successful that Andy Conibere, managing director of Call Flow Solutions, the company behind Whippet Internet, says he is looking to roll it out to Ightham, Ightham Common, Plaxtol, Ivy Hatch, Seal and Sevenoaks.

“Rural areas are crying out for this type of solution,” he said.

Mr Homans agrees. He said: “Now my property has proper broadband coverage and I have a new tenant.”

## Two ways to speed your connection

THERE are two campaigns to improve broadband services in Sevenoaks villages.

Call Flow Solutions, based in East Peckham, is planning to extend its Whippet service to most of Ightham, Ightham Common, Plaxtol, Ivy Hatch and parts of Seal and Sevenoaks not currently reached.

It has deployed transmitters on the nearby Vodafone mast that can now offer a fast wireless broadband service to residents within a 11km radius.

To sign up, users will need a radio receiver, typically mounted next to a TV aerial by one of Call Flow’s installers.

Call Flow charges between £8.99 and £22.99 a month for its service.

Internet company Gigaclear, which is only available to rural areas, also hopes to install fibre optic cables to houses in remote locations throughout the area.

The company requires 190 residents or businesses to sign up to the £39-a-month scheme, and so far more than 150 have committed to it.

Gigaclear will be giving a presentation at the Underiver Village Hall on Saturday to attract more residents to sign up for the specialised super-fast home broadband.

The presentations, to be held at both 10.30am and 1.30pm, are open to anyone in Underiver, Seal, Godden Green, Bitchet Green, Stone Street, Ivy Hatch, Shipbourne, Plaxtol, Dunks Green and Ightham.

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**WIRELESS:** David Rae says his broadband connection is now ‘brilliant’

## ‘We can now do everything from online banking to catch-up TV’

David Rae, 65, of Park Gate Road, Well Hill said: “The BT engineer who came out to see us managed to find a minute signal at our guttering where the phone line enters the house, but the signal couldn’t make it inside.

“We’ve had to make do with a dongle dial-up using the mobile network for years, but it only ever really gave us 98kb.

“It meant, for a while, we could bank online. Then the bank introduced animated graphics to its website, which created 15 times more data to download and the system couldn’t cope any more.

### Miles

“I think our exchange is at Knockholt, so it takes miles of phone cable to reach us and the signal just gets weaker and weaker the further it has to travel. There are only a few hundred of us up here and I suppose the phone

companies had better things to spend our money on than getting us broadband.

“County councillor Roger Gough and the late Sevenoaks councillor Colin Dibsall did outstanding work on our behalf and we got a capital grant from the county council to install broadband.

### Tenders

“We whittled the tenders down to three companies – one planned to lay cable to our door and the second was a combination of cable and wireless.

“We went with the third – Call Flow Solutions – who are wireless. The service has been superb.

“On average we’re now managing 16mb, although the best I’ve managed is 24mb. It means we can now do everything from online banking to watching catch-up TV. It has been brilliant.”

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